

Week Ending Friday, May 14, 1999

**Remarks to the Community at  
Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany**

*May 5, 1999*

Thank you very much. Secretary Cohen, thank you for your remarks and your remarkable leadership. We're glad that you and Janet are here with us today and there for the men and women of America's military services every day.

Secretary Albright, thank you for being able to redeem the lessons of your life story by standing up for the freedom of the people in the Balkans.

To the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Hugh Shelton—I was looking at General Shelton standing up here—you know, he's about a head taller than I am. And I thought to myself, he not only is good; he looks good. He looks like the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But what I want you to know is, however good he looks, he's better than that in the job that he does.

I thank General Clark for his leadership. Ambassador Kornblum, National Security Adviser Sandy Berger. Our USAID Director, Brian Atwood, is doing so much for the humanitarian relief. Brigadier Scott Van Cleef, thank you. Chief Master Sergeant Daniel Keane, thank you for making all of us feel so welcome here today.

I'd like to thank the distinguished German public officials and citizens who are here. And I'd like to thank the Spangdahlem oompah band and the gospel choir. Thank you. I thank all the men and women of Team Eifel and all your family members who are here. I am delighted to see so many children here today. And I hope this will be a day they will long remember.

The 52d Air Expedition Wing is crucial to our mission in Europe. There are so many to thank: the Stingers and Hawks, the Panthers, your guests here, the crews of the Flying Knights, all the hundreds of base operations and support personnel here, working

day after day and now night after night. We ask so much of you, and you never let us down.

Ever since the end of the cold war, this base has been busy with the challenges of a new era, training new allies, planning new missions, helping people in need like the earthquake victims in Turkey whom the 52d Civil Engineer Squadron assisted last summer. A few years ago, you helped to end the cruel war in Bosnia. And I'm sorry you have to do it all over again, but I'm proud of the job you're doing today in Kosovo.

Earlier this year, some of you in the 22d Fighter Squadron flew support for Operation Northern Watch. Since this conflict in Kosovo began, we have been depending on you more than ever. It's meant more hardship and more hard work for you. Many of your loved ones are right now flying out of Italy, and of course, these F-117 stealth fighters and their crew are here from Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. And they're a long way from their families.

Night after night—to Serbia, punching through enemy defenses; putting ordinance on target; returning home to debrief, rest, and then do it all over again: That takes courage and skill and a lot of support that we must never take for granted—refueling in midair; evading antiaircraft fire; pinpointing targets; seeking, often at great personal risk, to avoid civilian casualties; coordinating with crews from other nations; rescuing a downed pilot, as one of your squadrons did just a few days ago; and for the base personnel and the loved ones, always the anxious waiting for the aircraft to return.

One thing I have tried to make sure the American people understand in the years that I have been President is that your jobs have inherent dangers, even when not directly engaged in conflict. As many of you now know, just yesterday we lost two brave Americans in a helicopter training accident

in Albania. And today we grieve with their families and pray for them.

I came here more than anything else to say on behalf of your fellow Americans: We thank you for your service and your sacrifice. Though you're far from our shores, you are close to our hearts every day.

I also would like to thank the people of Germany, who are our allies in this cause and who do so very much to make all of you feel at home here in this wonderful country.

I just came from an operations briefing and a tour of the aircraft you fly from this base. I want to talk just a little bit about why you're flying. And I want all of you, particularly who have children here, who think about the world they will live in the 21st century, to think about why you're flying.

Our mission in Kosovo has nothing to do with trying to acquire territory or dominate others. It is about something far more important, creating the kind of world where an innocent people are not singled out for repression, for expulsion, for destruction just because of their religious and ethnic heritage.

You look around today at the people we have in uniform here. We have people from all different racial and ethnic backgrounds. We have people from all different religious heritages. And I think America's military is stronger because we try to get everybody's talents and put everybody's talents to the best possible use—not weaker. And I can tell you for sure that our country is stronger when we reach across all the lines that divide us and celebrate our differences but say that what unites us is more important.

All the differences that exist among people in the world, especially differences of religion, make life more interesting and more enlightening when they are limited by an understanding of our common humanity. But when people throw away that understanding of our common humanity and make differences the only thing that matter and make them so important they justify literally dehumanizing other people so that their lives, their children, their property, their history, their culture, even their faith in God do not matter, that makes life unbearable, and it makes civilization impossible.

And that is what we are fighting against in Kosovo, the same thing we fought to stop

in Bosnia. And if we want Europe to be undivided and democratic and at peace for the first time in history, and if we don't want your successors to have to come to this continent and fight another bitter war, then we must stand in Kosovo for the elemental principle of the common humanity of every breathing, living person in this continent.

The Alliance in which we are privileged to serve, NATO, is comprised of 19 democracies with 780 million people, tied together by a respect for human rights and the richness of all people, tied together in a conviction that we will build a Europe that is for the first time in history undivided, peaceful, and free. Kosovo is an affront to everything we stand for.

Two months ago there were 1.8 million ethnic Albanians living there; now nearly 1.5 million have been forced from their homes, their villages burned, their men often separated from their families and killed, some of them bundled and set on fire, the records of their family history and property destroyed.

The number of people dislodged there in 2 months is equivalent to the entire population of the State of Nebraska—kicked out of house and home without warning at gunpoint. It is—and those of you who were involved in Bosnia will remember this very well—it is the culmination of a deliberate, calculated, 10-year campaign by Mr. Milosevic to exploit the religious and ethnic differences in the former Yugoslavia, to preserve and enhance his dictatorial power.

His so-called ethnic cleansing has included concentration camps, murder, rape, the destruction of priceless religious, cultural, and historical sites, books, and records. This is wrong. It is evil. NATO, after the cold war, said that we would stand for the freedom and unity of Europe. This is occurring in the heart of Europe on NATO's doorstep. We must repudiate it. We must reverse it. And we intend to do that.

Now, when Mr. Milosevic started this campaign against unarmed people in Kosovo, with 40,000 troops and nearly 300 tanks, he

may have thought our Alliance was too divided, our people too impatient, our democracies too weak to stand against single-minded despotism. Every day, you prove him wrong.

NATO is now more united. Our objectives are clear and firm; Secretary Cohen said them. I want to say them one more time. This is not complicated. The Kosovars must be able to go home, safe and with self-government. The Serbian troops must be withdrawn, and instead there must be an international force with NATO at its core but, hopefully, with many other nations participating to keep the peace and protect all the people of Kosovo, Albanians and Serbs alike.

We have no quarrel with the Serb people. I say that again. We do not want to be guilty of the sin we are standing and speaking against. We have no quarrel with the Serb people. America has many great Serbian-Americans. They were our allies in war. Our quarrel is with ethnic cleansing and systematic killing and uprooting and the bigotry and death brought on by religious hatred. That is what we stand against and what we seek to reverse.

But for that to happen and for those people to go home and have self-government, there has to be an international security force with NATO at its core that will protect everybody there. We will continue to pursue this campaign in which we are now engaged. We will intensify it in an unrelenting way until these objectives are met.

You know, the gentle hills of this region, the Eifel region and the Mosel Valley, are peaceful today, thanks in no small measure to 50 years of Alliance and commitment, of which you are the most recent manifestation. But we mustn't forget that here, where we now are, there was a landscape of violence for thousands of years, from the time Trier served as a Roman capital just south of here. For two millennia, Europeans fought each other in the contested terrain around this base—two millennia.

Now, when you drive across these beautiful hills and you see these beautiful hills and you see these beautiful fields, war is unthinkable here and in most of Europe because of what your forebears did. And you can now look forward to a day not long from

now when, in the Balkans and throughout southeastern Europe, human rights are respected and the men and women of Spang are honored for doing your part to turn the dream of peace and human rights into an everyday reality.

This base was built in the aftermath of the Second World War at the dawn of the cold war. Because of Allied vigilance, the war we then feared would occur never happened. Now, planes are actually flying into combat from this base for the very first time to protect the future your forebears worked so hard to build.

I know this is hard. I know too many of these pilots are flying long hours with too little rest. I know the stress and anxiety must be unbearable. But when you wonder what it is like, next time you're in a meeting of American service personnel, look around at your differences, at your racial differences, the differences of background, the men and women together, the differences of religious faith, and thank God you live in a society that honors that, because we are united by things that are more important. And look at these little children here and think how terrible it would be for them to live in a world where a person could gain, increase, and keep political power by teaching young people like them to kill other young people because of their religious faith or their ethnic background.

That has no place in Europe or any other civilized society. And you have a chance to prove the dreams of the people that fought World War II and that held together during the long cold war to prove those dreams can be realized in Europe in your lifetime. And if you do, the people who wear the uniform of the United States military, 10 or 20 or 30 years from now, will not be called upon to spill their blood in another war because of some dictator's mad schemes to dehumanize a whole people. That is what you're fighting for, and that is what you will be grateful that you did for your children and the children of this continent.

Thank you so much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. in Hangar One. In his remarks, he referred to Janet Langhart Cohen, wife of Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen; General Wesley K. Clark, USA,

Supreme Allied Commander Europe; John C. Kornblum, U.S. Ambassador to Germany; Brig. Gen. Scott Van Cleef, USAF, Commander, 52d Air Expeditionary Wing; Chief Master Sergeant Daniel M. Keane, USAF, 52d Fighter Wing; and President Slobodan Milosevic, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). The President also referred to the Team Eifel Amateur Radio Society. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

### **Remarks Following Dinner With the Troops at Ramstein Air Base, Germany**

*May 5, 1999*

**The President.** Thank you very much. General Jumper, General Wooley, ladies and gentlemen, let me first of all say that I know I speak for all the people in our group—the Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, General Shelton, and others—in saying that we are delighted to be here and very proud of you.

I have been to Ramstein at least three times since I've been President. I was trying to think, it may be four. But I feel a special affinity for this base. I flew from here into Bosnia in 1995, when the people who were stationed here then did so much to restore freedom and peace to the people there.

There are a lot of things I'd like to say, as briefly as I can. First of all, I'd like to tell you I had a real good time tonight taking all the pictures and—[laughter]—I like having the opportunity to look our men and women in uniform in the eye and see where you're from and hear a little about your views. I thank especially the people who had dinner with me at the table over there tonight. I got questions about the Middle East peace process and the situation in Iraq and the long-term prospects in Kosovo and—

**Audience member.** Pay raises.

**The President.** —and pay raises, that's right. [Laughter] And they did a very good job. I want you to know, the guys at the table—they did a good job, because we talked a lot about how the Air Force and the Navy and this year probably the Army will be down on their recruitment goals and

the reenlistment problems and how we face the converging pressures of a very, very strong economy in the private sector—the strongest it has been maybe ever, certainly in a generation—and a very much increased operations tempo for people in the military, taking people away from their families more frequently and often for extended periods of time. And if that results in—those two things result in our not meeting our enlistment or reenlistment quotas, obviously, that only aggravates the up tempo problem further.

I think there is strong, overwhelming bipartisan support in the Congress this year to make some changes in pay, in retirement, in enlistment and reenlistment bonuses. And those three things plus some other things we're going to do, I hope will help to keep more of you in the service, and I hope will help to get more young people coming in.

The job market is very, very strong out there, as all of you know. And particularly after you've been in the service for a while and you've gotten the invaluable training that you get, I understand the temptations and the lures of taking those offers which wouldn't require you to be away from home so much and so far.

But I can tell you this: The United States military, because of people like you, can do things for a troubled world that no one else can do. And I am profoundly grateful. You're taking those supplies into the refugees in Macedonia and Albania—you must have talked to some of them. You must know what they have been through. And if you were involved in the operation in Bosnia or you talked to anybody else who was, you must know what they were put through and what it is that NATO is trying to stop in the heart of Europe.

At the end of the cold war, the question was, do we need a NATO? And the 19 Allies decided that, yes, we did; that if we wanted Europe to be free and united and at peace, we needed NATO and that would be our mission. And I wish there had been nothing for us to do—nothing for you to do. I wish none of you reservists or guards people had to be called up or had to volunteer. But it happened. And it is truly ironic that after all the wars in the 20th century, that here in